

University of Dundee

Shaping better places together

Al Waer, Husam; Cooper, Ian; Wright, Frances; Murray, Kevin; MacPherson, Iain

Publication date:
2017

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Al Waer, H., Cooper, I., Wright, F., Murray, K., & MacPherson, I. (2017). *Shaping better places together: Research into facilitating participatory placemaking*. University of Dundee. <http://uod.ac.uk/shaping-better-places>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in Discovery Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

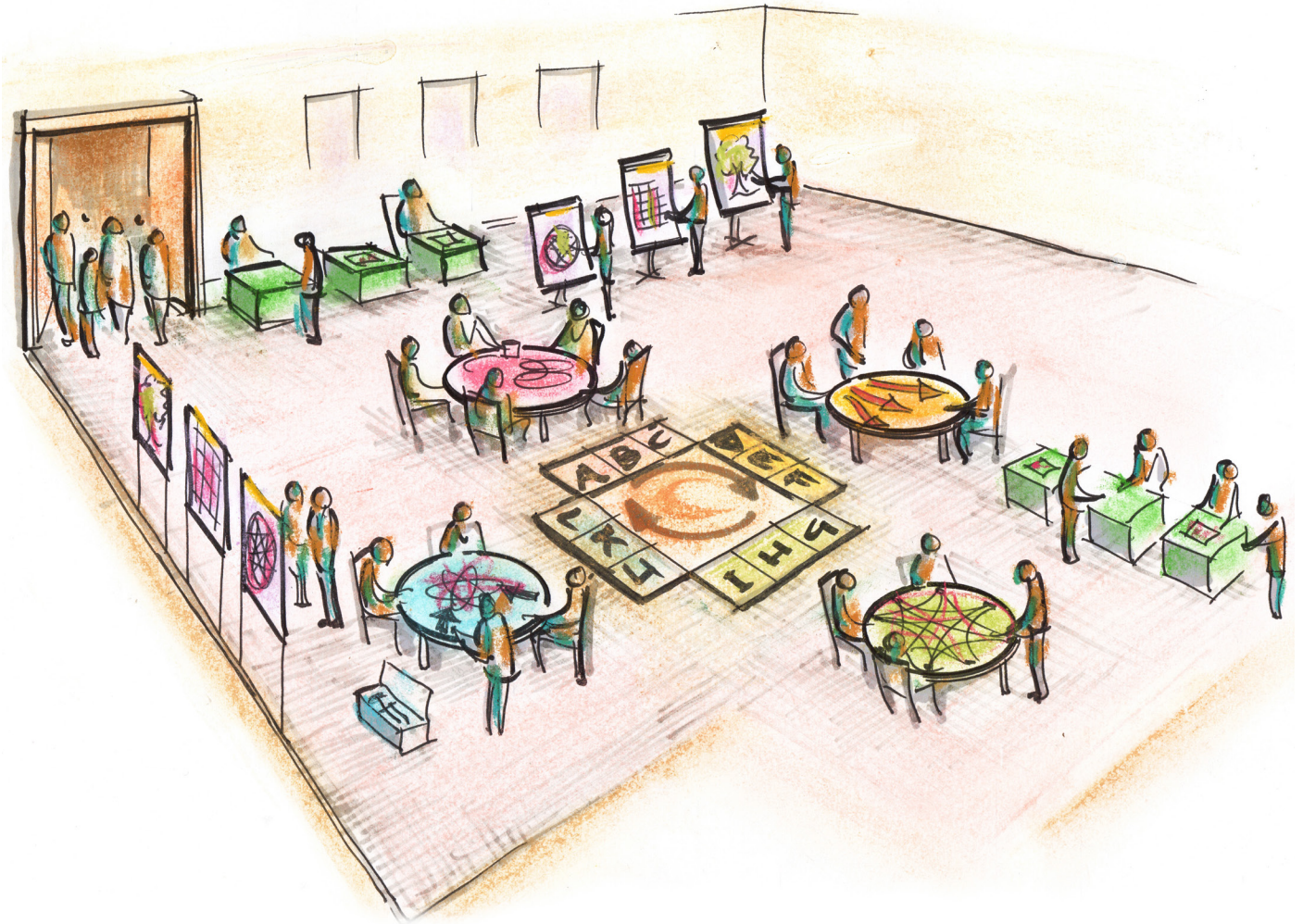
- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from Discovery Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot



Shaping better places together

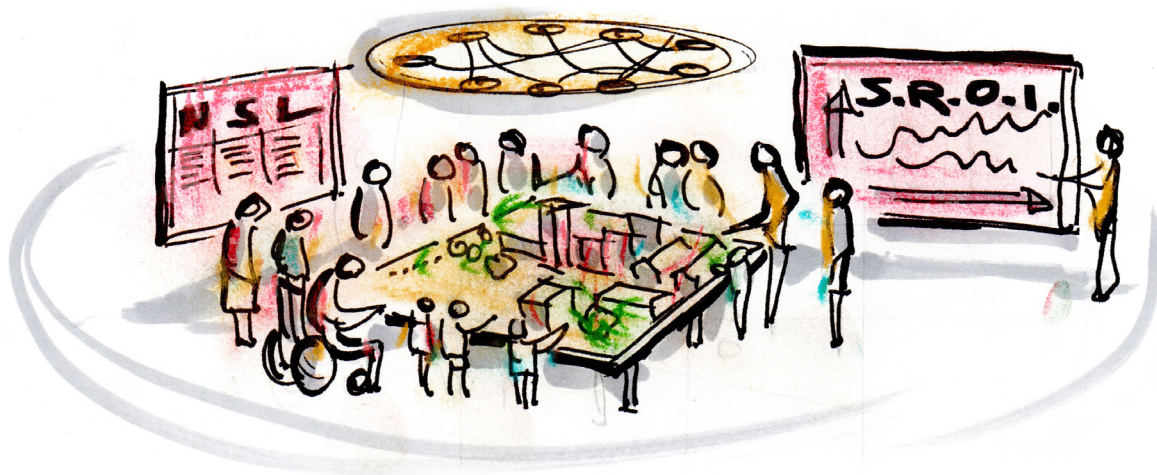
Research into the facilitation of participatory placemaking



University
of Dundee



Kevin
Murray
Associates



Foreword

This research led by the University of Dundee is a timely investigation into the skills and expertise required in the facilitation of participatory design processes.

'Creating Places' the Scottish Government's policy statement on architecture and place includes a commitment to engagement and empowerment stating that **'meaningful and sustained community participation in the design process to is crucial to achieving relevant and high-quality outcomes'**.

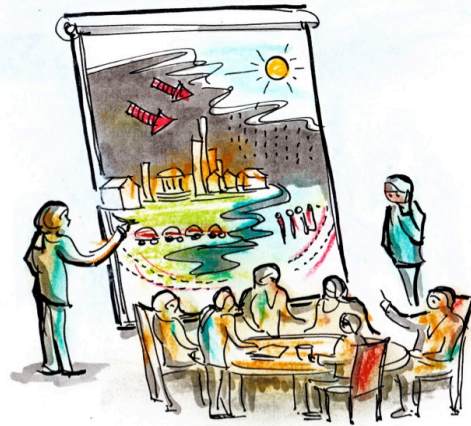
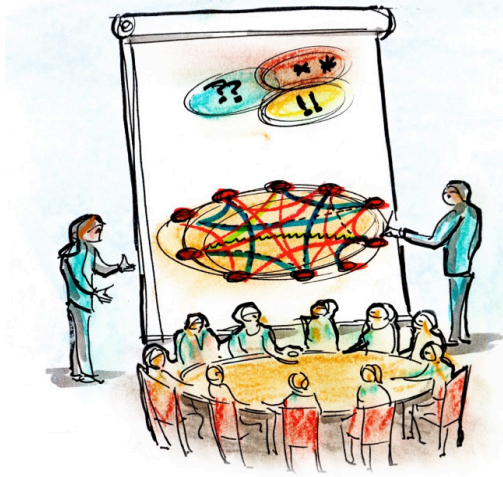
The Design Charrette programme which has been funded by the Scottish Government and the development and implementation of the Place Standard Tool has provided new and wide-ranging opportunities for participatory place-making processes to take place in communities across the country. This can also be viewed in the context of the Community Empowerment Act which gives communities more power to decide their own futures based on local need through asset transfer of land and buildings. Community engagement is also a key theme of the Planning Bill recently introduced to the Scottish Parliament and the upstream involvement of communities in the shaping of their neighbourhoods, towns and villages is seen as a crucial component of a revised planning system.

The research points out the key aspects of successful collaborative design led events and the vital role of the facilitator at various key stages in the process. Having a coherent strategic approach to facilitation, that is not simply about having creative community events and design discussions, but is also about helping translating that output into action and real projects.



The research is helpful in clearly setting out the key challenges that many communities and stakeholders will face when adopting a co-production model of place-making. It has been informed by the view of those directly involved and provides helpful suggestions on further work and research to influence best practice. The research is therefore an important contribution to an on-going process of harnessing the knowledge and expertise of communities in the shaping of Scotland's places.

Ian Gilzean, Chief Architect, The Scottish Government



Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared by a specialist team from **the University of Dundee, Kevin Murray Associates and Eclipse Research, and was supported by the Scottish Government.**

Managed by myself, the team comprised Frances Wright, Iain MacPherson, Ian Cooper and Kevin Murray.

This document summarises the results of research during 2017 into the **'potentially significant role of facilitation in participatory community design-led events, such as charrettes.'**

Our thanks go to all those who helped make this project possible. We gratefully acknowledge the support, guidance and encouragement, but particularly the ideas and inputs, received from a wide range of people in the business and community sectors, academia and practice, and the political and public policy communities – across Scotland and beyond.

We would particularly wish to acknowledge the contributions of the 115 individuals who responded to our online survey, as well as the 24 people who participated in the follow-up workshop in Dundee.

We are also very grateful to those who have contributed images, giving permission for their use including the report front and back covers by Dr Joe Ravetz of Manchester University.

We hope this research project provides new knowledge and renewed ambition, both for those who seek to engage facilitation expertise and for those who undertake the facilitation.



For the full report visit:

<http://uod.ac.uk/shaping-better-places>

Photo credits:

Dr Joe Ravetz of Manchester University pages 2, 3;
Kevin Murray Associates pages 4, 11, 12, 23, 26;
icecream architecture page 6; Nick Wright Planning pages 8, 20;
Ross Campbell- Photography (Dress for the Weather alongside Collective Architecture) page 24; Coalfields Regeneration Trust page 26

Dr Husam AlWaer, University of Dundee

Introduction

The publication of this report marks what we believe is the first serious attempt to examine the role of facilitation in participatory community design processes. The topic is a highly relevant subject, given the increasing application of participatory and community design-led events in Scotland and elsewhere, alongside the use of engagement tools such as the Place Standard.

This research provides an insightful guide, identifying the many components and variants involved. Our aim is that the findings should help our understanding, and ultimately enhance the performance and effectiveness of charrettes and similar participatory design-led processes. The research should provide knowledge confidence for professional facilitators, local authorities, local communities and the development industry who may be active in collaborative processes, underpinning the investment in skills and expertise of appropriate facilitators.



Key messages

The overarching messages from the research may be summarised as:

1. There is a **growing need for more collaborative, community-based design processes** in planning and contemporary place development - to meet changing needs and expectations, including to build trust in wider public/private discourse and governance.
2. There is a need for a **coherent, strategic approach to community-led planning and design**, including clear stages/phases and clear facilitator, designer and stakeholder responsibilities.
3. The evidence gathered indicates that **creative and intelligent facilitation is critical** to underpin the effectiveness of collaborative design-led events and there are **key skills and capabilities that such facilitators need** in order to best serve communities they are attempting to support.
4. There needs to be **better appreciation of the key steps around post-charrette following-through**, if such activity is to inform action and have a real impact.
5. There is a **need for core professional (built environment) facilitators** capable of addressing the very broad range of skills and capabilities required to manage design-led events effectively.
6. Built environment-based facilitators need to **supplementing their knowledge-base of technical domains, of urban design and planning, with social competencies** required for effective process management and stakeholder engagement.



Overview of Research Findings (1/2)

This study has identified a number of recurring themes which, if acted upon, could improve performance, enhancing the effectiveness of charrettes and other participatory design-led processes, and can help strengthen the likely deliverability of aspirations and event outputs.

As the challenges encountered in conducting the study indicate, community design processes are a good example of a ‘wicked problem’ - one that defies clear definition, with contradictory elements that can be seen from a multiplicity of stakeholder perspectives, and is difficult to appear to ‘solve’. Faced with the complexity of contending forces, there is no single paradigm around which to organise thought and action. Instead there are competing viewpoints about how best to deliver collaborative design-led events, and indeed about how much priority should be given to this. New approaches or solutions will require new outlooks, values and practices.



It is important to recognise that design-led events, such as charrettes, do not normally have any real legal or policy status in themselves. However, a community-led design process may be used as part of a statutory requirement to engage. So the outcomes may lack status until they are taken forward in some way within the formal planning system. This lack of formal status, and hence the requirement to legitimise the outcomes of design-led events, needs more research and consideration - especially around effective good practice. More investigation needs to be made into how design-led events are followed through in subsequent planning, design and other processes – such as planning mechanisms, management/oversight, and policy shifts (e.g. some charrettes produce outputs that can become Supplementary Guidance).



Community design processes need to be seen as capturing the **‘authentic’ expression of the aspirations and concerns of the stakeholders** who take part in them. At present, the current practice of participation may range from one-way ‘communication’ consultation and tokenistic engagement right through to citizen-led initiatives. Authentic (rather than cynically deployed) participation can enable a ‘bottom up’ decision-making process that is genuinely democratic.

Community design-led events **should never be seen as one-off**; rather they are part of on-going conversations with communities and relevant stakeholders to help to show progress, explain decision-making, and demonstrate that their contributions have made a difference. **Pre-event and post-event engagement with a community is necessary** to provide a transitional period of support that enables the community to take ownership of the process and outcomes.

There is a clear need to consider **how to embed and deliver outcomes** arising from design-led events within community-based approaches, and to address ‘hang-over’ effects where community members may be left confused as to how their participation ‘follows through’ into the next stage of action in the process.

Community design-led events are **likely to be undermined if there is no clear link to such post-event decision-making**. Without tangible delivery and real follow-up change/action – design-led events may even have a negative effect by leading to disillusion, fatigue and even growing distrust.

Aftercare and post development/implementation of the outcomes arising from design-led events is needed. This includes monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of design intervention goals (**such as monitoring the delivered quality of decisions and outcomes as a measure of performance over time**). This requires the development of solid key performance indicators (KPIs) and monitoring techniques that reflect measurable impacts.

Overview of Research Findings (2/2)

Overall there was a clear acknowledgement from stakeholders canvassed that the role of the facilitator is extremely important, but also that each case/project has its own particular context and circumstances. So there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to the role and effectiveness of facilitators in community design-led events. The context in which these take place is often unpredictable and ambiguous.

The role of the facilitator in community design processes is very varied. These variations relate to the range of fields in which facilitation is employed, the wide array of disciplines that can be employed, the varying agenda and techniques, as well as when the facilitator's role begins and ends. There is no single right answer here, just as there is no expert who can provide a single simple solution. Instead the knowledge and ideas that need to be called upon reside in many agents and require input from multiple stakeholders.

The engagement process should be as 'simple, open, creative and transparent as possible', with plain English used at all times. To achieve this objective, the facilitator should set clear guidelines that empower others, such as 'no idea is a bad idea' and 'build on the ideas of others', and participants should be encouraged to see the issues from the perspective of others.



In this research **‘a facilitator is an individual who enables groups to work more effectively; to collaborate and achieve synergy’** (Kaner, et al., 2007, p xv). She or he is a **‘content-neutral’** party who, by not taking sides or advocating a particular point of view during a process, can enable fair, open and inclusive participation in the accomplishment of the group’s work.

The study highlights **a diverse set of opinions on the role of facilitators in community design-led events**. For instance, some suggest that facilitators need domain-based (planning and design) understanding to ensure that the material from charrettes and other participatory design events can add to feasibility and deliverability of such output. Others hold that facilitators should be independent and professionally trained in order to ensure that the contributions from non-professional, lay stakeholders based on their local lived experience, are given due weight and attention.

Ensuring meaningful engagement is a key priority at the outset of any community participation process, embracing both positive and negative discussions to allow individuals and groups to feel not just included, but also valued contributors. This means not letting experts, or one particular interest group, hijack facilitated events but instead allowing local participants time to develop capability (and hopefully build consensus).

Urban planning and built environment education does not have an emphasis on some of the **‘soft skills’** deemed necessary – therefore incorporation of these into initial training would be valuable. Also, **Planning needs to be promoted as a crosscutting discipline** where mediation needs to be explicitly added to the list of subjects which planners study.



The roles of the facilitator may vary throughout community participation process stages. For example, a facilitator may at some point in the process act to help develop understanding of the issues involved, at another to explore design possibilities, and at another to assist in articulating recommendations/decisions. Some clarity may need to be established about whether design input is required from a facilitator; or whether this is to be provided separately by members of the design team participating in events. Where design-based facilitators are employed, attention is required to how professional versus lay experience and expertise will be given due consideration.

During design-led events, a facilitator has a responsibility to **help participants develop meaningful action or forward momentum**, and not just have open-ended conversations. Facilitators are not therapists - even if that may, in practice, be part of their role. There is a need to help construct routes forward, and not simply interpret the past, or build lowest common denominator consensus. This implies either that facilitators need some knowledge of design and planning processes (e.g. plausible development, policy or funding bids) and potential outcomes, or they ensure contributions from participants who do have these skills and capabilities in order to assist community members in formulating a way forward.

Theme I

The call for more collaborative, community-based processes in planning

Better engagement and collaboration with local communities is judged to be fundamental to the planning and delivery of sustainable places. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has a specific focus on promoting effective engagement and participation to help communities achieve greater control and influence in the decisions and circumstances that affect their lives. This policy imperative is being accompanied by a commitment to empowering local communities, giving individuals (including young people and other ‘seldom heard’ and ‘hard to reach’ groups) greater voice in shaping decisions through engagement with the planning system.

An independent review of the Scottish planning system (May 2016) commissioned by the Scottish Government recommended that actions should be taken to ensure that community involvement in planning for place is **‘fairer and more inclusive’**, taking into account the scale, appropriateness and resource implications of engagement processes (mapping of different techniques - multi-day charrettes/ surveys/ workshops etc.). Stating that “public trust in the system has declined rather than grown”, the report called for “more positive and productive relationships in all communities”, with **“a significant and substantive shift towards local community empowerment”**. Aiding these moves to more community involvement in planning place and in community empowerment, closer collaboration between local people and the professional specialists (i.e. members of design and stakeholder management teams) can help combine local and technical knowledge. The report recognised that local people contribute lay ‘expert’ knowledge about ‘their place’ and will ultimately have responsibility as ‘owners’ or ‘stewards’ of the eventual outcomes.

Community design processes have **the ability to harness and focus the efforts of professionals and local communities** working together on a specific project or place. As a result, they move beyond more restricted forms of engagement, such as information-giving and consultation, by apportioning responsibility and accountability to those involved. Within this context, **‘participatory community design processes’** may include charrettes or any other participatory design-led event like design workshops. Such events would normally form part of a participative, collaborative co-design process and not simply occur as a one-off consultation or as narrowly-based engagement around a specific issue.



Participatory design-led events (**also referred to as: charrettes, participatory placemaking, Enquiry by Design...etc**) include a synthesis of elements, not all of which are unique:

- Intensive and 'open' collaborative placemaking
- Participants may come from a wide range of groups and backgrounds – public + community + private + specialists – with correspondingly varied objectives and responsibilities.
- Strong design focus, live drawing, sketching, visual outputs/graphics
- Use of design as informed dialogue
- Testing, review, explanation sequences.

Terms associated with participatory design-led events are:

- a) Co-learning:** collaborative skills, information & exchange:
- b) Co-knowing:** collaborative knowledge which is wider & deeper than the individual:
- c) Co-creation / co-design:** creative insight, imagination & innovation:
- d) Co-production:** roadmap / action plan / future vision and scenarios.

This can involve:

- Integration of intuitive, rational and emotional knowledge
- Construction and review of future scenarios of place – 'what if...?'
- Series of iterative feedback loops
- Thinking in terms of whole place outcomes.



Theme 2

The purpose, structure and staging of community design processes

Community design processes are not necessarily about the built environment in a narrow sense. There is a need to reconcile place-making with stakeholders' needs, for instance, to achieve health and well being, or advance social, environmental and economic sustainability. The processes involved should not necessarily be viewed as linear from start to finish, but rather as iterative with a series of feedback loops. Over time, these may involve different stakeholder groups that help refine the process and outputs over time.

Integrating the insights drawn from the literature review, the survey, and the workshop within the research indicate that community design processes are highly likely to follow several of six key stages:



Stage 0: Brief and Purpose

These activities prior to Stage 1 are required to instigate the community engagement process, from identifying the issues to be addressed, deciding on the type of process to be used to addressing the issues and developing the funding and resourcing proposal. This stage is ideally organised with a stakeholder/management team (possibly including local authority/public agency, independent consultants, community representatives or third sector).

Stage 1: Pre-event preparation

This stage is ideally organised with a stakeholder/management team (possibly including members of the facilitation team) and a representative of all key stakeholders - not least the client/sponsors/local authorities. These collaborate to identify the scope and issue(s) and to establish the purpose and objectives of the event (including understanding any boundaries/limits), structuring its component parts and agreeing agenda.

Stage 2: Pre-event engagement and briefing session(s)

Here the facilitators should be involved in agreeing with relevant stakeholders - such as local community groups - the intended aims, objectives and outcomes of the community design event, along with establishing the terms of reference, general and detailed approach to publicity, engagement, notably any practical issues surrounding what may be anticipated within follow-on next steps. The purpose here is to strengthen the capacity of non-professional stakeholders to contribute to the design-led event effectively.

Stage 3: The community design-led event(s)

At this stage, it is essential that the facilitator/ the facilitation team create a 'safe space' which can support conflict-free relationships within clear boundaries, within which people can freely share their ideas, aspirations and concerns by jointly working through potentially difficult issues.

Stage 4: Post-event engagement (follow up events)

This stage ideally should be organised by a stakeholder management team (keeping the facilitator on board might be helpful, but is not seen as essential) to keep momentum going on the actions and desired outcomes agreed at the participatory design-led event. To maintain stakeholders' confidence and trust, it is important to report progress and explain any impediments/ delays to implementing what the community requested. Achieving this may require the stakeholder management team to work with and through delivery groups that lie beyond the planning system.

Stage 5: After care post-development/ implementation of the outcomes

This stage should ideally be organised by a stakeholder management team (the presence of the facilitator might be helpful, but is not essential). This can help maintain representation from all key stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the agreed outputs from the facilitated event, including design interventions and any other community-led social projects.

Community Design Event

It is essential that the facilitator creates a 'safe environment' which can support participants to share their ideas, aspirations and concerns, even on potentially difficult issues.

Pre-event Engagement and Briefing Session(s)

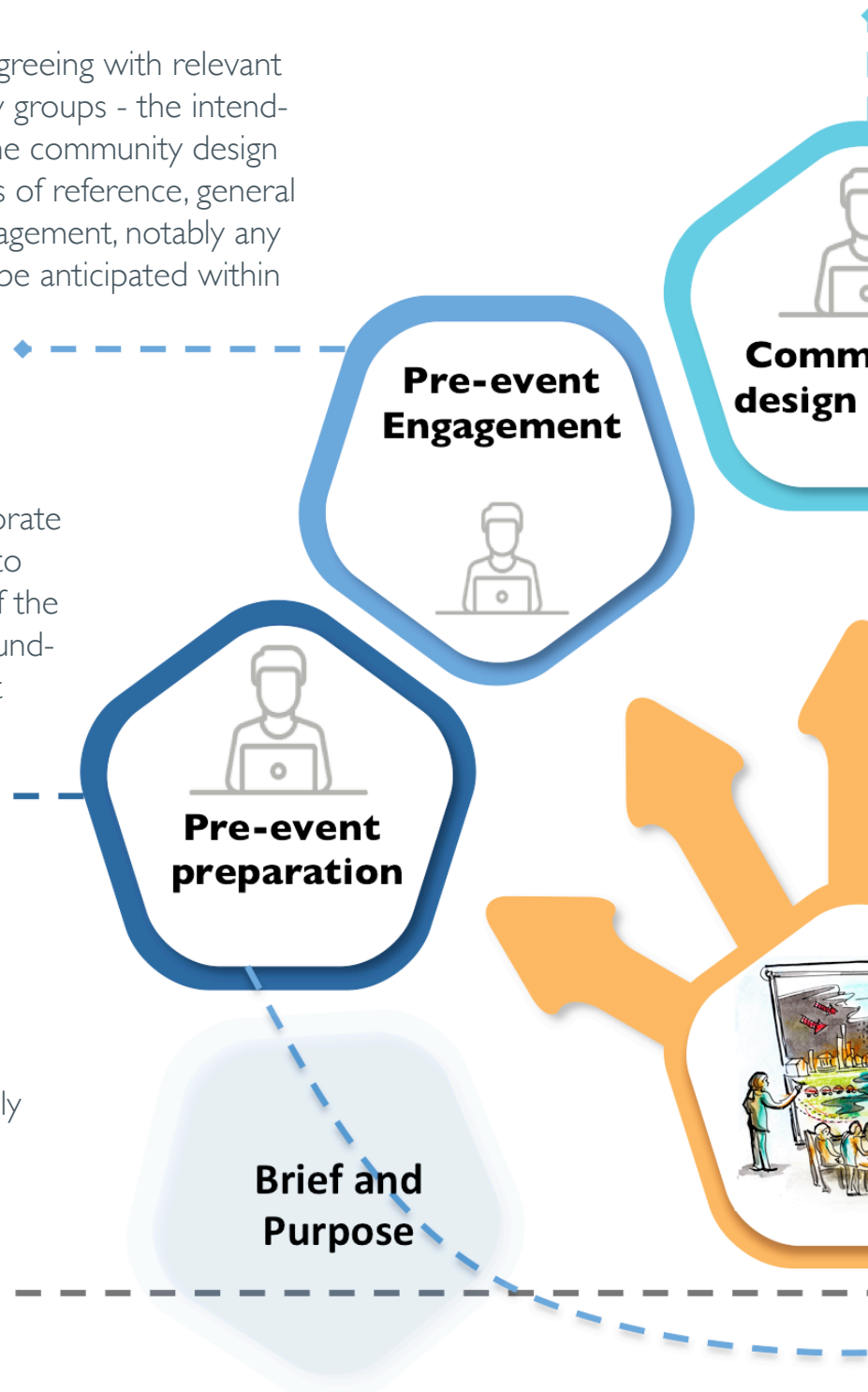
The facilitators should be involved in agreeing with relevant stakeholders - such as local community groups - the intended aims, objectives and outcomes of the community design event, along with establishing the terms of reference, general and detailed approach to publicity, engagement, notably any practical issues surrounding what may be anticipated within follow-on next steps.

Pre-event Preparation

Stakeholder management team collaborate to identify the scope and issue(s) and to establish the purpose and objectives of the event (including understanding any boundaries/ limits), structuring its component parts and agreeing agenda.

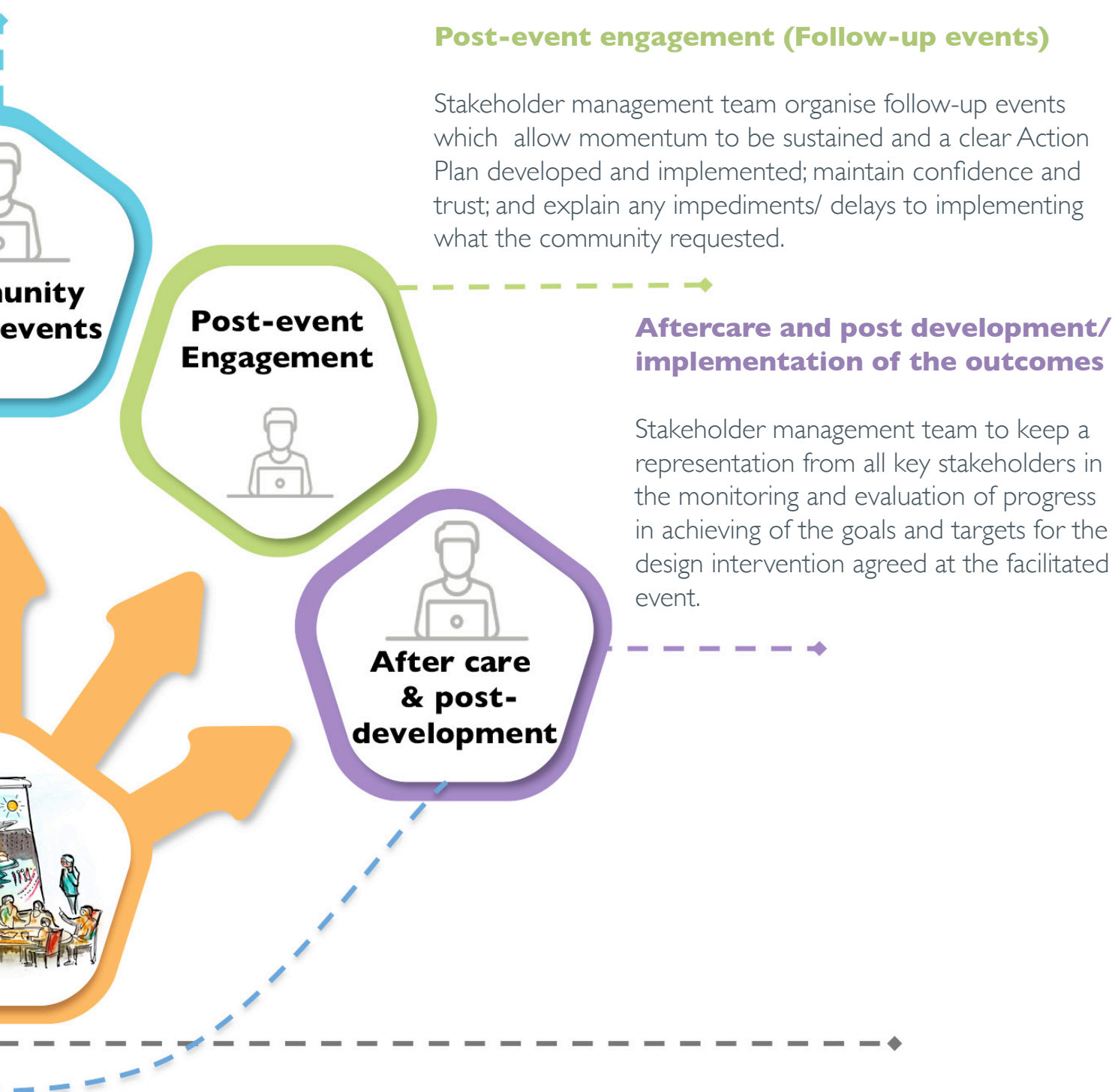
Brief and Purpose

This stage is ideally organised with a stakeholder/management team (possibly including local authority/public agency, independent consultants, community representatives or third sector).



Event(s) (intensive period)

...r/ the facilitation team create a
...support conflict-free relationships
...which people can freely share
...ncerns by jointly working through



Design Processes

Theme 3

The community design led stages and stakeholder responsibilities

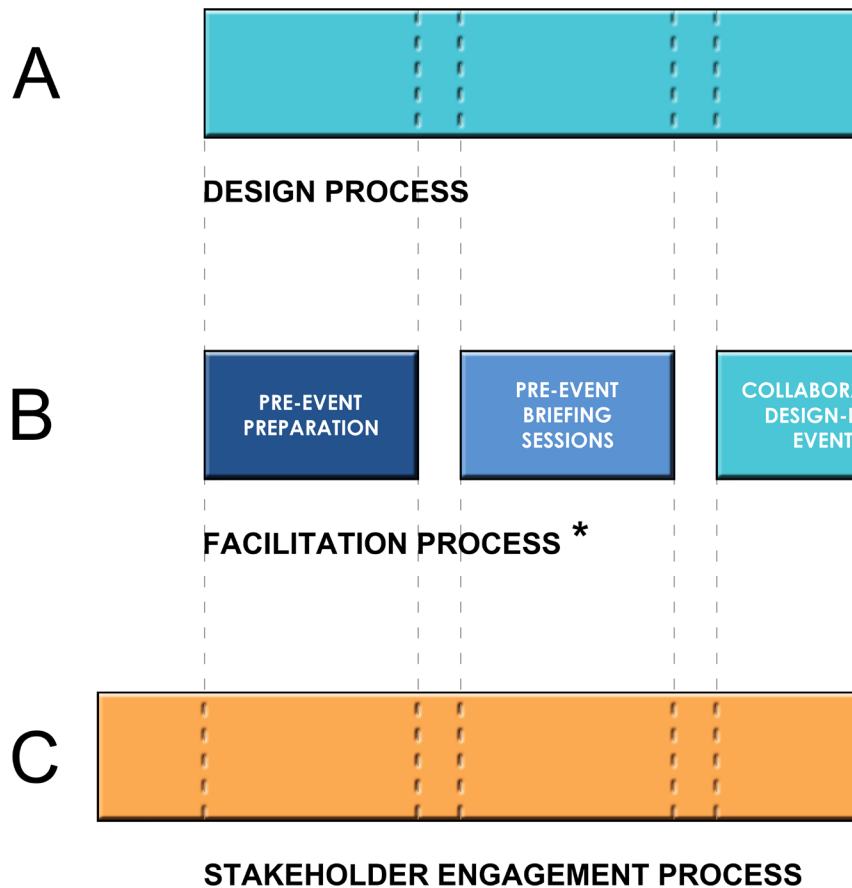
The study distinguished between three groups of operators that are engaged in three parallel processes. While each of these processes have distinct tasks to deal with, the reality is that there is a lot of crossover between them, with each requiring the others to enable continuity and progress towards events and outcomes.

The design process (supported by a design team): The design team may comprise architect/landscape/urban designers/ engineers/ transport and infrastructure planners, neighbourhood/ environmental planners, sometimes economic and costs planner; also heritage and cultural specialists. The scope depends on the brief and challenge. They could be independent consultants, local authority/ public agency, or third sector; including volunteers – e.g. students.

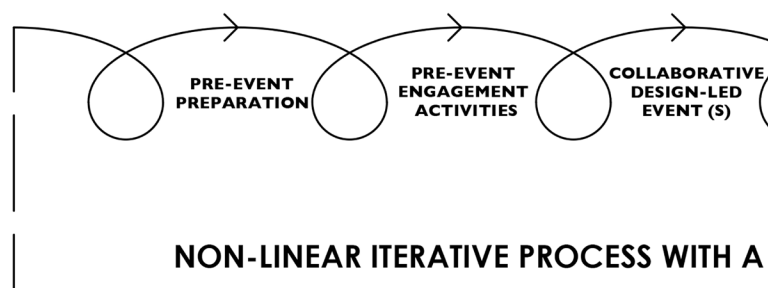
A stakeholder engagement process (supported by stakeholder management team): The term 'stakeholder engagement process' is used to include people who want/need/desire to be comfortable communicating in front of people. Often coming from clients, consultants, planning, housing, development project management, architecture and design, even the art world. In this sense the stakeholder management team 'often' pre-exists the collaborative design event and it continues afterwards.

Facilitated event(s) (supported by a 'time-limited task force' or 'facilitation team'): whose members may be drawn from the design and stakeholder management teams supplemented by (professional) facilitators.

THREE PARALLEL PROCESSES AND

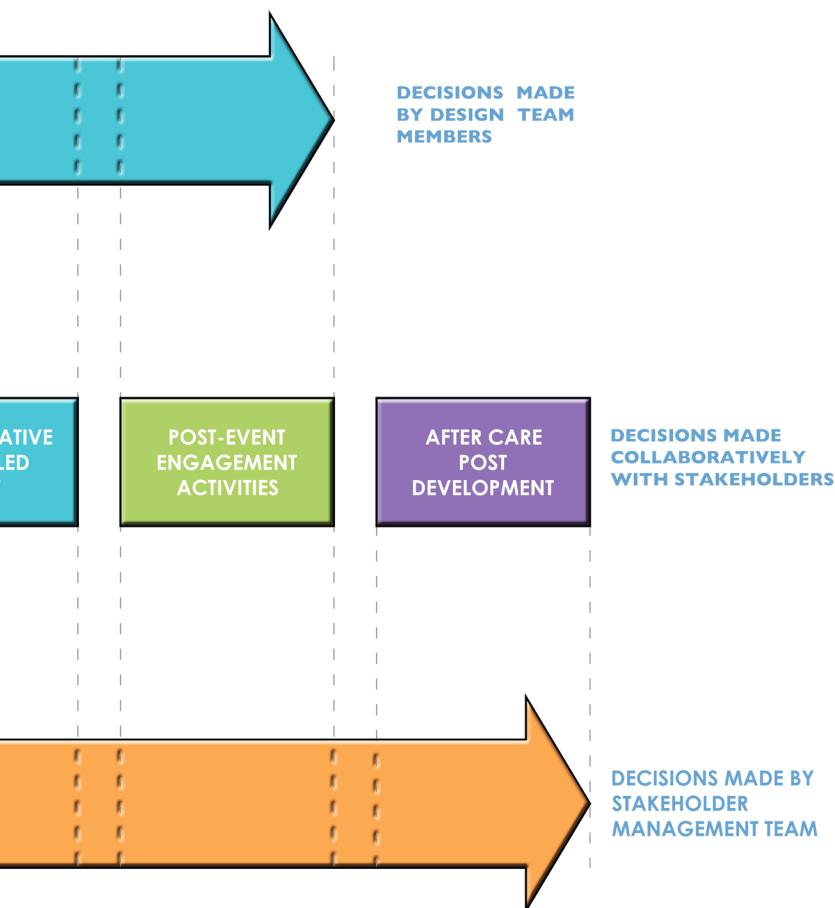


* FACILITATION TEAM :
TIME LIMITED TASK FORCE, MEMBERS MAY BE DRAWN FROM I

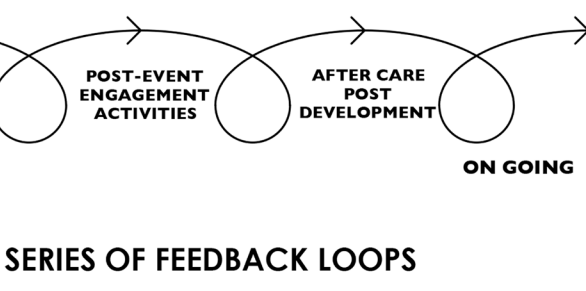


In practice, the real world is much messier than this description suggests. The extent to which these three teams function as recognisably separate entities is a moot point since there may be cross-over in their membership and hence confusion over their responsibility for the activities required.

DESIGN AND STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT TEAMS IN OPERATION



DESIGN AND STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT TEAMS



The stakeholder management team often pre-exists the collaborative design-led event and continues afterwards. **There is a degree of overlap between the role/responsibility of both the 'stakeholder management team' and the facilitation team, but their functions are different.** Both can be challenging in different ways. For example, the stakeholder management team has to build and maintain a **degree of trust** from all of the stakeholders it is engaging with throughout all of its activities, including the client and commissioning partners - whereas a facilitator must instantly gain the trust of community members and other participants from the start of a design-led event.

Often the facilitator **temporarily** joins the stakeholder management team - to facilitate the event - just as members of the stakeholder management team join the facilitator to make up an enlarged facilitation team. Importantly, **the facilitation team is time-limited:** (it is more properly a task force). Its activities grow leading up to the collaborative design-led event and then diminish (cease) after it. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that these three (parallel) processes are operating, and clarity is needed about the specific support that each team requires and how this contributes to the effective delivery both of design-led events and the long-run collaborative processes of which they are part.

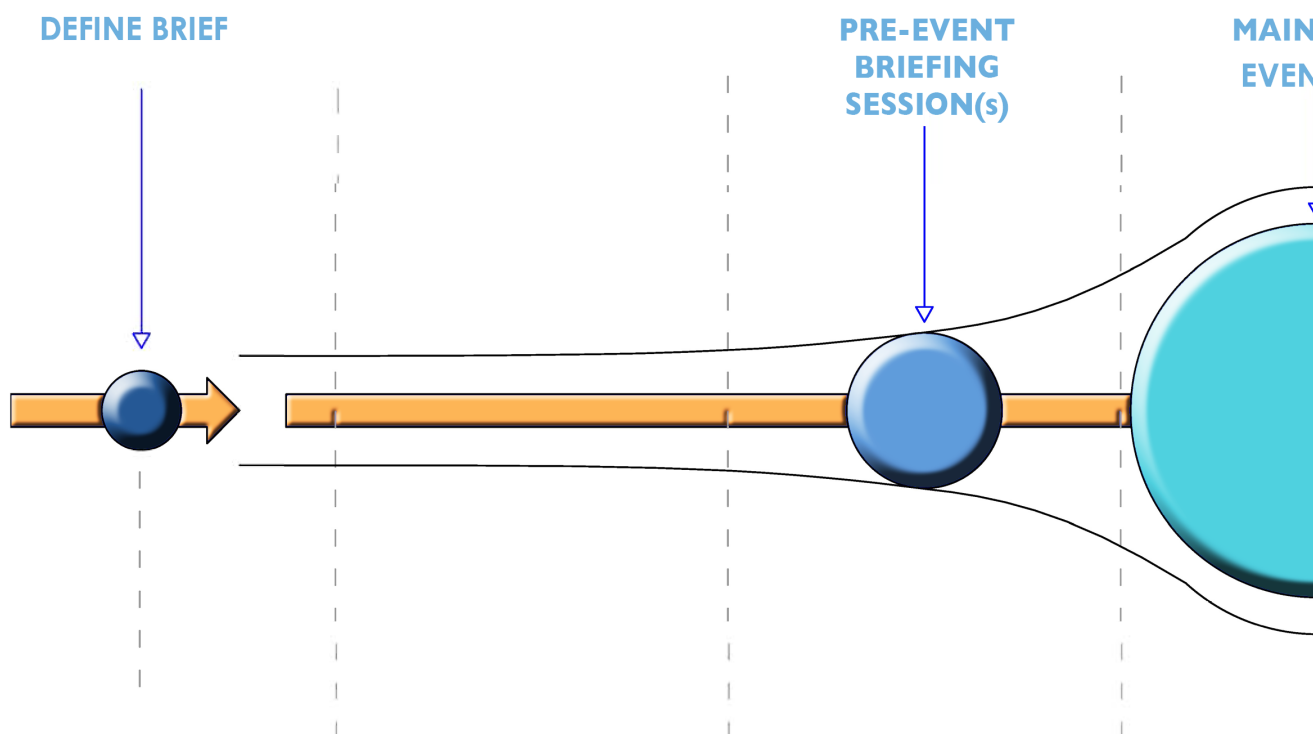
Theme 4

The importance of using facilitation in community design-led events

There needs to be a clear definition of the scope and type of facilitation required for community-based, design-led events and of the facilitator's role and purpose. Others involved in the process (whether members of the design team or the stakeholder management function) also need to clearly understand their own role and contribution.

Robust stakeholder analysis should be undertaken by the stakeholder management team, identifying: who needs to be involved from start to finish of the whole process (including the facilitation team); who needs to be involved in specific design-led events; who needs to review progress; and who needs to be involved further, looking forwards and implementation etc. Some stages in this process might not need a facilitator – but some degree of facilitation is required throughout the whole process. Where and when is dependent on the context and the particular circumstances that need to be managed.

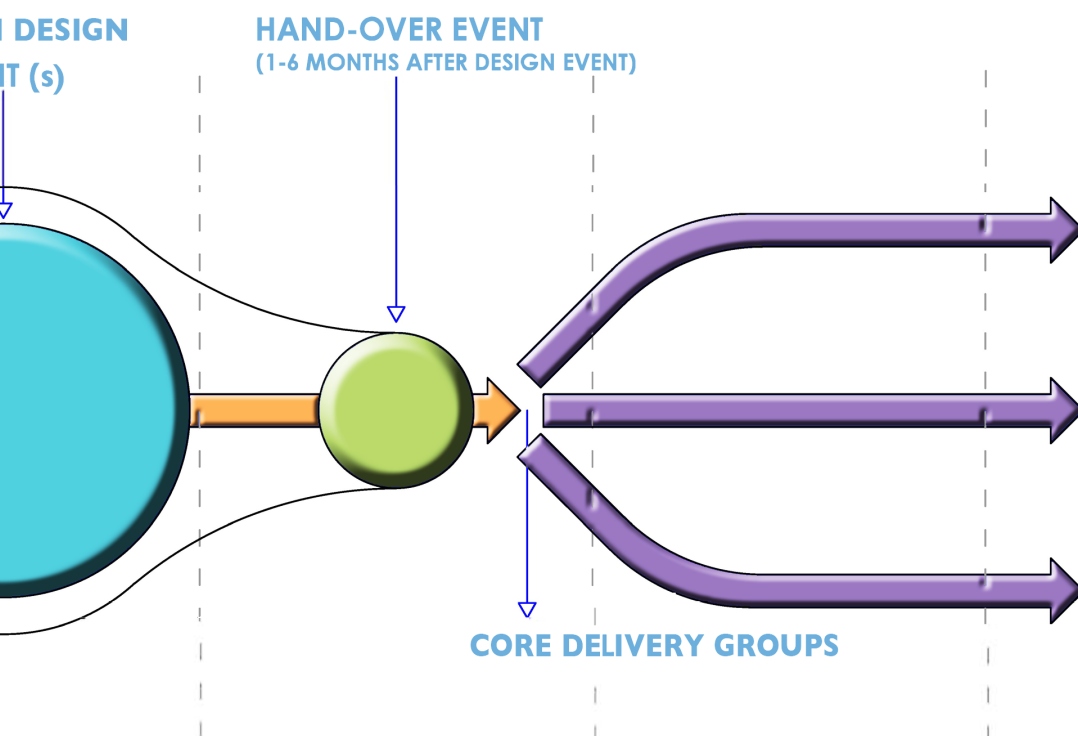
STAKEHOLDER/ COMMUNIT



Different levels of engagement at different stages of group swelling to participate in the main event, and

It is important to recognise the time-limited, task force nature of the facilitation role because this raises the question of who is responsible for delivering the decisions and acting on the outputs arising from any collaborative design-led event. In part, these responsibilities can be taken back into, and acted upon, by the design and stakeholder management teams. They may need to be enacted through what may be regarded as ‘delivery groups’ who may have wider memberships than these two teams, drawing on other stakeholder groups involved the collaborative process. Such delivery groups cannot themselves act separately, since their activities need to be integrated by the stakeholder management team through ‘networking’.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT DURING PROCESS



the community design process, with the stakeholder 'waning' to a core group leading on delivery.



The role of facilitation in the five key stages

A facilitator's role can be, and often is, restricted solely to the 'during the event' stage. Sometimes, they are involved, to a lesser extent, in the 'before' and 'after' stages. But the stakeholders canvassed in this study point to facilitation having a contribution to make to all five stages, particularly in terms of providing the soft, people management skills required. Whether this is necessary strongly depends on the extent to which these skills can effectively be delivered by the client and/or other professionals involved in the design and stakeholder management teams.

1. *Pre-event preparation - some facilitator input required*

There is a need for facilitator input early on, especially where:

- the stakeholder/management team does not have a neutral role (i.e. they may be promoting the plan/solution/special agenda);
- the client or community sector is not used to this role – so a facilitator could be helpful in building trust in the process and methods;
- there is a need to establish the principles of the approach, including in event management, and how material will be dealt with.

It is essential to try to avoid the criticisms levelled at the early charrettes that the facilitators were 'parachuted in' and then left the community once the event was over.

2. *Pre-event engagement and briefing session(s) - some facilitator input required, but not essential*

The facilitator could attend the main Community Briefing event - to be visible, build awareness and trust in proposed event. Otherwise expectations could be mismatched. Facilitated engagement could support effective decision making about the overall structure of the event and who with appropriate authority and responsibility should be invited to attend; factors which could dramatically impact on the success of the engagement process. It is important for facilitators to come across as neutral and listening - even before it all starts. They do not need to be at all preparatory meetings - but there are benefits in doing so – as this may result in fewer gaps in method or process.

3. Design-led event(s) - facilitator input essential

The input of the facilitator here is essential. A facilitator directs the whole event. But the rest of the facilitation/design team need to be synchronised and aligned in order to manage and deliver a smooth event. The expectations of the facilitator role and that of specialists, client and community, should all be known and stated at the beginning of the event in order to effectively manage a 'live' process. It is important that the facilitator brings out the ideas of all the stakeholders assembled, and draws on the knowledge, expertise and creativity of the design team.

4. Post engagement event(s) - facilitator helpful, not essential

Involvement at this stage is desirable, but not essential unless the facilitator has acted as the main front-person during the previous stages and then it is best for them to continue if they remain valued and trusted.

5. Aftercare post-development / implementation of the outcomes - facilitator input helpful, not essential

Again, it would be better if the facilitator is present at this stage but this may be less crucial the community, in the form of trusts, partnerships or networks, is taking ownership and leadership of delivery phase 6, 9, or 12 months after the design-led event.



Theme 5

Facilitator skills required to run successful community design-led processes

The skills and attributes deemed to be useful for facilitators are being Organised, Impartial, Flexible/Adaptable, Open-Minded, Inclusive/Fair, Approachable, Honest/Trustworthy, Practical, Self Aware, Empathetic, Empowers Others, Builds Consensus, Challenges Assumptions, Seeks Inclusive Solutions, Effective Communicator, Good Listener, and a Mediator.

Some of these skills are actually personal qualities or behaviours, like empathy or humility. Some can be more readily taught and learned – like mediation, leadership, authority, consensus building, and urban design. Key skills within the set are: *preparation* (as an adaptation of organisation), *impartiality* and *seeking inclusive solutions*, and *consensus building*. A well-structured event will encourage use of all of these skills since the event structure should be constructed to lead to effective listening and communicating.

In the survey, both the professional facilitators and the non-professional participants were asked to rank what they saw as the top 'six priorities' of the selected competencies, skills and qualities - those which they considered to be the most essential for successful facilitation. The following is a breakdown of the submissions by both participants and the facilitators based on the frequency of responses and in hierarchy order.

Facilitation skills	Participants (57)	Facilitators (58)	Total (115)
Effective Communicator	41	41	82
Organised	42	36	78
Good Listener	33	34	67
Impartial	39	25	64
Empowers Others	28	26	54
Challenges Assumption	21	29	50

The variations in the table indicate that, while those who run community design events and those who participate in them share some criteria for assessing how well such events are run, their views are not identical. Facilitators need to understand where they and those they facilitate (dis)agree and consider how to make the necessary adjustments to best meet participants' expectations.

Facilitators require skills drawn from the domains of coaching, mediation, therapy, and community development - not simply architecture, planning and urban design. However, **the facilitation team does also need to understand planning law, policy, local government, action planning, and the production and management of built environment, in order to build traction and secure funding and regulatory approval.** In other words, just because the facilitator is neutral - and may deliberately play a 'naïve role' - does not mean they are ignorant. **They should know where things are likely to 'end up'.** For example:

- **Skilled/creative facilitation can make for engaging events** - that are fun - but may not be taken forward;
- **Skilled facilitation - with some knowledge of processes** - can help generate more plausible/feasible ideas solutions etc (eg in design terms);

- **Skilled facilitation - with deep knowledge and understanding of process and funding streams** - can add to the likely deliverability of the outputs/outcomes. They do not ensure deliverability, but they can contribute towards it in manner that less knowledgeable (in a professionally technical sense) facilitators cannot.

Accordingly, there is a need for the core professional (built environment) facilitators to address the very broad range of skills. They need to do so by **supplementing their knowledge-base of technical domains, of urban design and planning, with social competencies** required for effective process management and stakeholder engagement. This is necessary in order to link spatial planning and community planning, including co-ordination between service provision and physical design considerations.



Conclusions

The precise format and output from any community-based design-led event will vary, not only because of its given situation and context; it will also be dependent upon its purpose and objectives and whether it is embedded in wider, longer running processes. If the overall goal is to create places that are ‘liveable’ and environmentally responsible, economically productive and resilient, able to react to changing contexts and timescales, then the stewardship of the process and outcomes of the design-led events cannot rest with a ‘single hand’, however ‘responsible’ they may appear. A wider network of shapers and contributing stakeholders is required, including members of the local residential and business communities.

Community design-led events may be less concerned with the precise detail of format than with providing a **positive and proactive place-shaping process that can bring ‘tangible and intangible’ outcomes and benefits**, such as a sense of place and ownership/stewardship, a healthy environment and a good quality of life. Thus, tangible delivery and real follow-up change/action are key. Even events that are successful on the day may risk a negative effect if non-delivery leads to disillusion, fatigue and even growing distrust. In other words, the follow through is ultimately the key to success, and that success cannot be gauged simply from what occurs on the day, but is manifest across a longer time horizon.



The collaborative process needs to create integration and synergy across professional disciplines and process stages, and to build trust and common purpose between team members and local stakeholders from a wide range of backgrounds and constituencies. Ideally the aim is to engender a deep, collective understanding of the places where interventions are planned through developing dialogue and deliberative participation. Enabling such important collaborative dialogue is an important skill required of the facilitation team, if robust approaches to delivering better places and sustainability are to be developed.

Facilitation is commonly based on 'democratic principles'. No matter how large the differences (of power; status, education, social capital) between stakeholders outside of the community design-led event, within the event facilitators are expected to construct a safe space where, for instance, 'truth can be spoken to power', and where professionals' expertise and lay people's lived experience are both treated as valid currency. To achieve this, **facilitators are called upon to give all participants an equal voice and air-time during the discussions that underpin decision making in community design-led events.**

Facilitators should ensure that they discharge their role in a manner that supports this aspiration. However, they also have a duty to signal where their own experience suggests that a proposed course of action is unrealistic or likely to result in failure. **Balancing these two aspects of their role – impartial inclusivity against offering (experience-based) advice** - can be difficult for facilitators, especially those operating in a domain where they themselves have specialist skills or expert knowledge – when, for instance, they are themselves built environment professionals or community development officers. **No hard and fast rules can be offered for how to choose between these two positions.** Facilitators will need to use their own judgement about how best to operate.

Whichever they choose, some participants are unlikely to be satisfied. As a result, facilitators have to be transparent whenever they depart from impartiality to offer advice and be explicit about why they have done so.

Facilitators have to develop 'soft', interpersonal people management skills that enable them to reach out and draw people into the decision-making in a comfortable way. This may not always be a part of the mainstream skills set of built environment professionals. Further competencies can become more important in particular situations or local contexts. Impartiality is important – and whereas **built environment specialists are often trained to act as advocates in order to pursue their discipline-based 'professional' agendas**, these may not coincide with those of other stakeholder groups. Since a team's role is to be impartial and the approach is deliberately open ended, the facilitator has an explicit role in building consensus while showing evident awareness of the constraints within which the event is framed.

Further, professional **facilitators are being asked to act 'ethically'** by encouraging and supporting collective practices through managing community co-design and delivery of services. They are being called upon to embrace and enable an expanded sense of civic responsibility. They are being asked to do so in a way that adds value with limited resource - often only between £3k and £8k of a total collaborative design process budget of £30-£50k.

Facilitators are being asked to move beyond their comfort zones, broadening their views and being responsive to context through attention to detail. Better community design will be achieved by 'new thinking' which is **purposeful, visionary and committed to the improvement of processes**, based on knowledge of what actually works in practice, along with an appreciation of what has not worked and what needs to be improved or abandoned.

Next Steps

At the outset of this study, the research team was aware that there were many different interpretations of the role of facilitators within Community Design Processes and no general consensus. A range of very different respondents have contributed their own insights to this exciting and evolving area of practice. We knew that the research was unlikely to reveal singular or definitive solutions to all the challenges of reconceptualising Community Design Processes. Nor was it our remit to specify a set of authoritative mores for the practice of Community Design Processes. Rather, this study has offered a chance to explore the meaning of a critical dimension of contemporary planning and design processes in a manner that is directly informed by the experience, aspiration and concerns of those active in this field.

By highlighting current thinking on the subject, it is hoped that this research-based study will help those involved in Community Design Processes to identify key questions, confront underlying assumptions, break down barriers between professionals and stakeholders, and assist placemaking through more reflective practice. Given the complexity of processes identified in the research - in terms of context, governance, outcomes of design deliberation and sense of community ownership - it is evident that much more work is needed to better understand and improve the facilitation and community design roles.



Questions for future research

Key research questions arising from this research that are relevant across both academic disciplines and practice domains, include the following:

On the role of facilitators

- 1-** What constitutes effective best practice for clarifying the level of substantive planning and design expertise a facilitator requires, if any, at any given community design event?
- 2-** What constitutes effective best practice for the management and integration of the work undertaken by 'the design, facilitation, and stakeholder management teams'?
- 3-** How, when and where do facilitators acquire and mature the skill set identified as necessary for supporting such design-led events?
- 4-** How best can the 'soft' skills required for facilitating design-led activity be inculcated in the initial and mid-career training of professionals such as architects and planners, for instance by hands on role play training?
- 5-** Does the skill set identified need to be developed across all the members of the facilitation team and not just in the lead facilitator?

On the community design processes

- 1-** How can the results arising from community design-led events be more effectively linked to post-event decision-making and delivery?
- 2-** What transitional support can be afforded to enable community stakeholders to take ownership of subsequent stages of community design processes?
- 3-** How can the critical pre- and post-event activities, on which the efficacy of community design-led events clearly depends, be resourced to become more robust?
- 4-** What legal status (legitimation) can be given within the planning system to the agreed decisions/outputs (actions arising) from design-led events, bearing in mind the proposal to abolish Supplementary Guidance.
- 5-** What monitoring practices, including KPIs, are necessary for assessing the measurable impact of agreed design goals and objectives?



For the full report visit:

<http://uod.ac.uk/shaping-better-places>

To discuss the project in more detail, please get in touch with:

Dr. Husam AlWaer
The University of Dundee
School of Social Sciences (Architecture + Urban Planning)
Matthew Building, 13 Perth Road, Dundee, DD1 4HT, UK

Office: +44(0)1382348805

Mob: +44(0)7732857727

Email: h.alwaer@dundee.ac.uk



**University
of Dundee**



Kevin
Murray
Associates